

at that time might have faced about whether he would join the Army and fight or stay home and protect his family. Also, stepping inside the perspective of a slave, I'm asking my students to consider, 'What would tug me to stay here and remain "owned" and what might tug me to flee along the Underground Railroad with Harriet Tubman?' It's not so much about having my students come to a correct answer as it's about creating an opportunity for them to notice and understand the rationale behind various viewpoints individuals or groups might have."

In reflecting on the use of this thinking routine, Clair commented, "For me, Tug-of-War has evolved from being one cool thing I do with one novel to filtering itself into so many other aspects of my curriculum and even across the curriculum to other subject areas. Tug-of-War is not just a set of steps or a procedure; it's a mindset—a real process. It transcends so much more than just one activity—it's truly about perspective taking and reasoning." Now that Clair's students are familiar with the thinking process, Clair notices that they seem to be better listeners to one another and can better articulate their own thinking with comfort and confidence. Clair mentioned, "You know, I've become more comfortable with this kind of thinking, too, by using this thinking routine. Some of the issues we come across at this age are big, complex, and even difficult... like slavery... like war. I've found this routine to be so helpful in making sense of sticky situations."

SENTENCE-PHASE-WORD

In your discussion group, review the text that you have read and each select your own:

- Sentence that was meaningful to you, that you felt captures a core idea of the text
- Phrase that moved, engaged, or provoked you
- Word that captured your attention or struck you as powerful

As a group, *discuss* and *record* your choices. Begin by each sharing your words, then phrases, then sentences. Explain why you made the selections you did. Looking at your group's collective choices of words, phrases, and sentences, reflect on the conversation by identifying:

- What themes emerge?
- What implications or predications can be drawn?
- Were there aspects of the text not captured in your choices?

This routine is an adaptation of the Text Rendering Experience developed by educators affiliated with the National School Reform Faculty. Having used this protocol—that is, a structure for a conversation—for discussing readings with other adults, we felt it had wide applicability for use in the classroom as both a discourse and a thinking routine. We liked the fact that something as simple as one's choice of a single word, phrase, and sentence forced one to think about big ideas and often led to rich discussions. Because we like to name routines by their thinking moves whenever we can, we changed the name to Sentence-Phrase-Word (SPW).

Purpose

Sentence-Phrase-Word helps learners to engage with and make meaning from text with a particular focus on capturing the essence of the text or "what speaks to you." It fosters enhanced discussion while drawing attention to the power of language. However, the power and promise of this routine lies in the discussion of why a particular word, a single phrase, and a sentence stood out for each individual in the group as the catalyst for rich discussion. It is in these discussions that learners must justify their choices and explain

what it was that spoke to them in each of their choices. In doing so, individuals are often struck by how a single word can have the power of conveying the essence of a whole text. The discussion of sentence, phrase, and word choices sets the stage for considering themes, implications, predictions, and lessons to be drawn.

Selecting Appropriate Content

Choose a text that is rich in content, with ideas and concepts that invite interpretation and discussion. This can be fiction or nonfiction, but strictly informational texts may be difficult to discuss. The length of the text chosen is important in this routine. If it is too long, students will be more likely to skim it and not have the patience to read it carefully. An engaging chapter in a book, a professional reading that discusses problems of practice, a newspaper article, a poem, or a scene from a play can be used effectively with this routine.

Steps

1. *Set up.* Give learners time to read the selected text in advance of the discussion unless the text is short and can be read on the spot. Encourage active reading and highlighting of the text. However, it is not necessary to read with Sentence-Phrase-Word in mind.
2. *Select a sentence-phrase-word.* Ask learners to identify a sentence that is meaningful to them and helped them gain a deeper understanding of the text; a phrase that moved, engaged, provoked, or was in some way meaningful to them; and a word that has either captured their attention or struck them as powerful. It's important to be aware that each learner's experience will be reflected in the choice of words, phrases, and sentences. There are no correct answers.
3. *Share Selections.* In groups of four to six people, ask learners to each share and record their choices, explaining why they selected them. Sharing and discussion should occur in rounds, so that discussion is facilitated. The first participant shares her sentence and explains why she chose it, inviting others to comment and discuss. The sentence is recorded and then the next person shares, records, and discusses until everyone has shared his or her sentence. Then the group moves to phrases and finally words. This keeps the discussion flowing and deepening.
4. *Invite reflection on the conversation.* Each group looks at its documented responses.

They identify the common themes that emerge from these responses and then the implications and/or predictions they suggested. Finally, the group identifies any

aspects of the text that were not represented in their choice of sentences, phrases, and words.

5. *Share the thinking.* Post the documentation from all the groups. Provide time to look at the sentences, phrases, and words chosen and the themes and implications drawn. Invite each group member to reflect briefly on his or her current understanding of the text and how using the routine contributed to his or her understanding of it.

Uses and Variations

Teachers have found some surprising uses for SPW, from capturing the essence of a text students are studying for a test to developing language fluency in early childhood. In these adaptations, teachers sometimes focus on just a portion of the routine, combine small groups with whole-class use, or even use the "Identify a part to stand for the whole" aspect of the routine for use with stimuli other than text. Adaptations can also be made in synthesizing the conversations. Although it is natural to pull out themes, you could also identify morals and messages or make predictions depending on the text. This diversity of uses is captured in the following brief examples from teachers at Ballik College and elsewhere.

- After reading articles in history classes, teacher Sharonne Blum finds that the sentences, phrases, and words her grades 9 and 10 students choose provide wonderful springboards for discussion as they search for commonalities and discuss the differences and the interpretations they have made for each.
- When Josie Singer wants her grade 8 English classes to review novels they have recently read, she groups the students in pairs, allocates a chapter to each pair, and asks them to complete a Sentence-Phrase-Word. Josie then goes around the class, commencing with the pair who reviewed the first chapter. Each pair gives a quick recap of the chapter using the sentence, phrase, and word they have selected and the reasons for their choices.
- Although we thought this routine was strictly text based, preschool teacher Lindsay Miller adapted Sentence-Phrase-Word for her pre-readers using individual pages in picture storybooks and asking her four-year-old students to look carefully at the page, choose one thing on the page that they thought was really important and then one small section of the page, and explain how and why they made those choices.
- Also working with young children, a first grade teacher in Merrill, Michigan, has his students collectively nominate sentences, phrases, and words after read-alouds. He

records this collection to read back to students at a later date, asking them to guess which story the responses are from.

Assessment

The individual sentence, phrase, and word choice usually will not tell you much about how students are making sense of the text. However, the explanations learners provide for their selection of sentences, phrases, and words can say a lot about what they are taking from the text and what struck them as important. Is the reasoning behind these choices showing that learners have been able to capture the essence of the text? Are learners identifying significant concepts and issues or are they staying peripheral? What kinds of personal connections lie behind the choices?

In the discussions, look for students to make connections with others' responses rather than merely focusing on their own contributions. Are learners able to use the sentences, phrases, and words as springboards for discussion? Do these discussions go back to the text to deepen and enrich the discussion?

Tips

While this routine asks for three specific choices, it is not always essential to complete all three steps to achieve the purpose. Particularly with younger children, as shown in Lindsay's example, the use of the two steps—sentence and word—can be very effective. It is also fine to reverse the order of the routine, starting with the selection of a word, then a phrase, then a sentence. In fact, some teachers have found that discussions that begin with word choices and then move to phrases and sentences build more naturally. You may want to try it both ways and see what you notice.

To aid discussion, it is important to document the evolving conversation. A simple three-column division of a large piece of chart paper works well for this purpose. Underneath those three columns you can draw three horizontal rows for groups to identify themes, implications, and what was in the text that was not represented in learners' choices. However, don't let the recording of responses distract the group from conversing about the choices and ideas. When an individual shares his or her selection, he or she should reference the page and paragraph from which it came so that others can find and read it in context. Having the group's sentences, phrases, and words in front of them captures the conversation and makes it easier to discern themes, implications, and what might be missing!

A Picture of Practice

When Lisa Verkerk wanted her fifth graders at the International School of Amsterdam to better understand the human impact of the slave trade, she selected the book *From Slave Ship to Freedom Road*, written by Julius Lester with paintings by Rod Brown, as the vehicle. "This is a very interesting book," commented Lisa. "The paintings were first created by Rod Brown, and when Julius Lester saw them exhibited, he asked if he could write a story to accompany them. However, the text, though only a single page for each image, is rather challenging for my students."

To deal with both the richness of the images and the complexity of the text, Lisa decided to separate the book into a selection of individual images with their accompanying text. This would allow small groups of students to look at the images, help each other in reading the text, and then fully discuss a section of the book. Following this small-group work, Lisa planned to call the class together to share their sections and collaboratively build an understanding of the story.

To begin, Lisa shows the class one of the paintings, and together they use the See-Think-Wonder routine to begin to make sense of it. Lisa tells the class, "We've used See-Think-Wonder many times, and I want you to begin to look at the image your group has using that. Really examine it and discuss it. They are beautiful pictures, and they tell their own stories. I think you will see why Julius Lester was so captivated by them. And then, once you're done with that, you can read the text together. We're going to use a new routine to explore the text. It is Sentence-Phrase-Word."

Although Lisa had first experienced this routine as Word-Phrase-Sentence, she realized that her students in past years seemed to find it easier to select one important sentence that summed up the big idea, then a phrase that supported it, and last one important word. She explains to students, "After you have read, and you may need to read it more than once, I want each person in the group to select one sentence. It will be a sentence that you feel really captures a big idea in the text. What is it that you think Julius Lester wants you to take away? And then, you will select a phrase. Now the phrase shouldn't be part of the sentence. Try to find a new one. One that helps you gain a deeper understanding of the text. And then finally, choose your word. A word that strikes you as powerful or important."

Because this book study is situated within a larger unit called "Different People, Different Lives," Lisa wants her students to focus on the themes and implications from the text. "Our unit is contemporary," Lisa adds, "and I want to see if students can make connections between a story that happened a long time ago and some of the issues that are present in our world today."

Lisa assigns groups and hands out the individual pages of the book. What follows is a period of intense and purposeful discussion, each group completely absorbed in their pages. Students make careful observations, discussing what they see. Stopping in at a group, Lisa encourages students to ask each other, "What makes you say that?" as they begin to interpret the paintings.

Once Lisa feels that individual groups have thoroughly looked at the images, she encourages them to read the text aloud to each other. It is not long before students are heard deliberating over their choices of sentences, phrases, and words and justifying their choices to their peers. After each student's response has been recorded, the groups move to discuss the themes and implications, making connections to present-day world events. Students have spent close to 90 minutes working, and Lisa collects the pages of the book and students' documentation for the day. You can watch this initial exploration of the book using these two routines on the DVD. As you watch, pay attention to the level of engagement the combination of rich content and the facilitative structure of the routines enables.

The next day, students are eager to share their thinking with the rest of the class. Lisa displays each picture on the interactive whiteboard so that everyone can take a few minutes to look carefully before the groups present. Lisa then asks the group to give a one-sentence summary of what is happening at this stage of the story before sharing their sentences, phrases, and words. Lisa documents these on chart paper for everyone to see. The class and teacher question individuals, asking them why they thought a sentence was so important or why they chose that word. Last, the group shares the themes and implications that they found significant, which are also documented on separate charts. Page by page, the students jointly build their understanding of the story, distilling the essence of the story through the sentences, phrases, and words; recognizing the important themes that the artist and author wanted their audience to think about; and finally making a connection from the past to the present.

Reflecting on the learning, Lisa comments, "Students are often filled with awe at what they achieve. They feel, and quite rightly, that they have made some important discoveries. They have developed a much more comprehensive understanding of

the story of the slave trade than if I had just read the book to them. And, they are connecting to the contemporary issues they have heard about on the news or at the dinner table."

At the end of the week, the class returns to the Themes and Implications charts Lisa has left on the wall of the classroom. She reads through all of the ideas that surfaced, discussing them some more. Lisa asks her students to consider which themes or implications stand out for them; which are personally significant, powerful, or important; and which they would like to reflect upon in their painted reflection journals, another routine Lisa has established in her classroom (read more about this in Chapter Seven).

Lisa puts on acoustic music and students quickly get to work. At the end of the painting session the students roam around looking carefully at each other's paintings and reading the written reflections that accompany them. They comment on things they like, similarities of ideas or significant differences, what surprises them, and so on. Often something precious and previously private has been revealed, leading the class to a sense of deep personal sharing. Lisa believes that in these moments of collaboration, self-discovery, honesty, and openness, the relationships that will sustain a culture of thinking in a classroom are developed and nurtured. "One of the reasons I find the routines so effective is that they help the students to find their own voices and to value and respect the voices of others."